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CONCERNING ADAM AND EVE

BY ANNA BRANSON HILLYARD

THE children were listening round-eyed to Valentina, their fourteen-year-old Mexican nurse.

"An' there was no mens at all in the worl' then; an' God he say, 'I mek me some mens to say prayers to me!' So he dig up a lot of nice, clean dirt, an' he go down to the arroyo an' get a bucket of water; an' he mix the dirt an' the water, an' he mek him some mens, jus' lak you mek mud pies. He put the mens in the oven to bek, an' the first one di'n get brown enough, an' that the white man; an' the secon', he bek jus' right, an' he the Mexican. But God, he forgot to tek the las' one out till he all burn' black, an' *he the nigger!*" She paused dramatically.

"And *then* what did God do?" asked the little boy, who wanted a complete cosmogony. But Valentina had seen me, and she was too shy to go on.

"Who told you that story, Valentina?" I asked.

"Nobody," she answered. "I jus' mek it for myself."

* * *

So, ever since there began to be human beings on the earth, boys and girls and men and women have made for themselves stories of how their species began, and why it loves and hates and suffers and dies. In these stories, grotesque and absurd though many of them are, we find the first awkward, childish stirrings of curiosity concerning the why, the whence, and the whither of the universe; curiosity which has given the world all the religion, all the philosophy, and all the scientific knowledge it has today.

In the eighth or ninth century before Christ, an unnamed Hebrew who possessed the story-telling gift of the Oriental in matchless degree, wrote out a great collection of the legends of his people, handed down by word of mouth through many generations. His skill in word-painting has

made famous to all Jewry and Christendom, and to the Moslem world as well, the names of Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, upon whom God, with friendly hand, shut the door of the Ark; of Abraham and Sarah, who entertained God in their tent, and laughed at Him when He promised them a son in their old age; of Jacob, robbing Esau of his birthright, serving seven years for love of Rachel, and wrestling with a flesh-and-blood God on Peniel.

A cynic has said, "God made man in his own image, and man has done as much for God." This Hebrew scribe of wonderful genius made God a very human divinity, a man of heroic size, kindly when given his own way, angry when thwarted, merciful when his rage had spent itself. And he told, in the first scroll of his collection, the most famous story of the creation of man by an anthropomorphic God, and of that man's disobedience and fall, that the human imagination has ever conceived—the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which was copied into the second and third chapters of Genesis by the Hebrew prophets of the fifth century B. C., when they compiled that religious history of their people which Christians call the Old Testament.

It is worth one's while to reread that story, familiar though its main points may be, and then to read it again, more carefully; for until Charles Darwin in 1859 forced the thinking world to consider his theory of evolution, two-thirds of mankind accepted it as a divinely inspired account of the origin of man, in spite of the fact that it contradicted the account given in the first chapter of Genesis. The reason of the contradiction has been brought to light by the investigations of Biblical scholars during the past sixty years; it is that the compiler of Genesis was piecing together two documents, one of them the record of the brilliant story-teller, the other written by an austere priest a century later. The priest, learned in Babylonian philosophy, and touched with the vision of a God who is Spirit, wrote the grave and sublime account of creation that is contained in the first chapter; to it the compiler, seduced by the charm of the story-teller, added, unconscious of its incongruity, the naïve tale of Adam and Eve and their anthropomorphic God.

That tale must have been evolved, as all folk lore is

evolved, from the first childish efforts of a primitive people to explain the mystery of life and death. Man exists; when he dies, his body turns to dust; therefore a being greater than he must have made him out of earth in the beginning. That being, lord of heaven and earth, men call God. A man and a woman are mysteriously and passionately drawn to one another, with longing that is satisfied only when they become one flesh; that must be because the two of them once were one body, and the woman, being the smaller and weaker, must have been made from the flesh and bone of the man. Man toils and sins, suffers and dies; surely a good God could not have planned this: a man must have disobeyed God, and deserved punishment. Woman is subject to man, and bears his children in agony; was her sin then greater than his?

The tradition of a first man made of clay and given life by the breath of God is found in folk lore all over the world; and the belief in the making of woman from man's rib is widely spread in Polynesia. The Lengua Indians of Paraguay say that man and woman were joined together at first, but they found their joint existence so awkward that they asked their creator to separate them. When he granted their request, he gave them the power to propagate their species. There is a similar Persian legend; and Plato, in his *Symposium*, gives a fantastic account of an original man-woman, with two heads, four arms and four legs, whom Jove cleft down the middle, making two sexes.

Philo, a great Jewish theologian of the time of Christ, embodied this idea of Plato's in his commentaries on Genesis. Eve, he said, represents the sensuous or perceptive half of man's nature; Adam, the reasoning half; and the serpent symbolizes sensual pleasure, which is the source of all sin. The serpent does not dare attack Adam directly, but approaches him through Eve, for it is sense which yields to the lure of pleasure, and in its turn takes captive reason, and destroys its immortal virtue. Origen and Clement conveyed this interpretation into Christian theology, although they were conscious that it did not dovetail at all neatly with the doctrine of the excellence of the married state. The question raised by Augustine as to whether Eve's soul was derived from Adam, or was directly infused by God when he made her from Adam's rib, was at the heart of one of the great controversies in the early church.

The second part of the Hebrew story, the account of the Fall, shows signs of being a composite of two earlier tales. Sir James George Frazer, who knows more folk lore than any other man, living or dead, thinks he can trace in it two famous and widespread stories, the Story of the Perverted Message, and the Story of the Cast Skin. The former is told among native tribes all over Africa, and its purport invariably is that God sent a messenger to tell man that he was not to die; if he seemed to die, it would only be for three days, just as the moon seemed to die for three days, and after that time he would come to life again. But the messenger, in some of the stories stupidly, in others with malice prepense, told man instead that he would surely die, just as the moon dies. Man believed the messenger, and therefore he dies. A number of the stories say that two messengers were sent, one to tell man that he would live forever, the other to tell him that he would die; and the messenger of good tidings was slow of foot, so that the word of death came to man first, and he refused to believe the word of life when it came.

The Story of the Cast Skin is found frequently in Africa and in the Pacific Islands. It is based on the belief that snakes have immortal youth at the cost of shedding their old skins yearly. Men and women used to have this privilege, too; but there was once an old woman who had an infant grandchild, and when she came back to him young and beautiful, after bathing in the river and shedding her old skin, he cried and would not let her touch him. So she went back to the river and fished out her old skin, which had caught on a root, and put it on again. Ever since then mankind has lost the power of renewing its youth.

Some of the African and Melanesian tribes combine the two stories. For instance, one version is that the Good Spirit, loving men, wanted to make them live forever. So he said to his brother, "Go to men and take them the secret of immortality. Tell them to cast their skins every year. So will they be protected from death, for their life will be constantly renewed." But his brother gave the message of hope to the serpents, and commanded men to die. Since then all men have been mortal, and all serpents immortal.

If Sir James Frazer is right, the original version of

the Hebrew story of the Fall was that God sent the serpent with a message to Adam and Eve, urging them to eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, but not to touch the Tree of Death, "for in the moment that ye eat thereof ye shall surely die." (The idea of a fruit that will produce immortality, and the personification of both wisdom and evil by the serpent, are found in many countries.) But the serpent, "who was more subtile than any beast of the field", decided that he would eat of the Tree of Life himself, and to dispense with rivals, he went to Eve and said:

"Eat not of the Tree of Life, but eat of the Tree of Death, and live forever."

So Eve ate of the Tree of Death, and gave Adam of its fruit; whereupon they and all men became mortal. But the wily serpent ate of the Tree of Life, and he and his kind became immortal.

If that was the original version, all the more honour to the nameless Hebrew scribe for changing it into its present form!

The Semitic imagination which created the tragedy of the Garden of Eden was not content to let its exquisite simplicity go unadorned. Adam's head, according to Rabbinical lore, was made of earth (*Adamah* is the Hebrew word for earth) from the Holy Land, his trunk of earth from Babylonia, while his limbs were modeled of soil brought from more distant lands. He was as glorious as an angel to look upon, his body stretched from earth to heaven, and his skin was like a bright garment; but when he sinned his stature was diminished, and his skin shone no more. His first wife was Lilith, who flew away from him and became a demon. Lilith kills all children sinfully begotten, even of a lawful wife; she seduces unmarried men, and bears them demon children. On his right side Adam had thirteen ribs instead of twelve, and out of that extra rib and of flesh from his heart, Eve was made.

It is from the Rabbahs that Milton gets the idea that Eve urged Adam to eat of the fruit of death because she was jealous of a possible successor.

A Rabbi of the Christian Church, St. Augustine, is responsible for the complementary Miltonic theory that Adam ate the fruit because he loved Eve too dearly not to share her fate:

"If death

Consort with thee, death is to me as life.

Our state cannot be severed: we are one,

One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself."

Mark Twain's Adam, after several hundred years of matrimony, was still satisfied with his choice of Eve. "It is better," he said, "to live outside the garden with her than inside of it without her."

The doctrine of Original Sin, which has laid on Adam the burden of all the sin and death in the world, is the creation of Paul. Curiously enough, there is not a single explicit reference in either the Old Testament (exclusive of Genesis 3) or the New to the story of the Fall, outside of the Pauline Epistles. In commenting upon Adam's sin, the Jewish Haggadists emphasize the efficacy of repentance; and against Paul's "For as in Adam all die," they protest, "No man dies without a sin of his own," quoting Ezekiel, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked upon him."

No other doctors disagree so emphatically as doctors of divinity. Perhaps the best way to take the story of Adam and Eve is to take it as a story; to read human nature into it as you will, but not to be dogmatically sure of the divine nature it reveals, since its God walks in the garden in the cool of the day, flies into a passion at disobedience, curses bitterly his comparatively innocent creations, and then, repenting of his fury, makes them garments of skin to replace their lost glory of innocence. It needs only that final touch of the armed guards stationed at the gate of Paradise, keeping poor mortals, hungry for immortality, from the Tree of Life, to establish the presumption that the God of the Garden of Eden is a god made in the image of man.

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